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New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

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†*"Get Away Old Man" opened Wednesday, November 24th, at the Cort Theatre.*

†*"Lovers and Friends" opened Monday, November 29th, at the Plymouth Theatre.*

†*"Carmen Jones" opened Thursday, December 2nd, at the Broadway Theatre.*

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

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NEW YORK TIMES
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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
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"Carmen Jones"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 3, 1943

'Carmen Jones' Simply Superb Negro Adaptation of 'Carmen'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

DEEMS TAYLOR recently wrote Oscar Hammerstein that he'd just been to the Metropolitan Opera to see "Carmen" in whiteface. It was a well-taylored gag—but prophetic. Billy Rose's Negro version of the Bizet opera, "Carmen Jones," makes any other performance seem pallid, and I'm not trying to pun.

It rates all of the handsome adjectives that hurried fingers can find on a midnight keyboard. It is superb; it is enchantingly beautiful; it is musically exciting and visually stirring; it is a most admirable contribution to a theatrical season which already has given us "Winged Victory"—and it still is "Carmen," straight and pure.

"Carmen Jones" opened last night at the Broadway Theatre. It is not a version or an adaptation of the Bizet score and the Meilhac-Halevy book; it is a transliteration of these. It makes its people black, instead of Spanish; its time is shifted from the never-never time of grand opera to this moment; its locales are changed from a cigaret factory to a parachute factory, from a bull ring to a prize ring, from a smuggler's retreat to a barbecue roadhouse. And not once is "Carmen Jones" wrong.

Same Tragic Ending

The story now tells of a sexy little bum, Miss Jones, who lures a gentle-spoken soldier named Joe (Don Jose) away from nice little Cindy Lou (Micaela). Then Carmen goes off to Chicago with a prize fighter, Husky Miller (Escamillo), and Joe follows her and stabs her outside the stadium. His last anguished song, as he falls across her body, goes:

String me high on a tree
So dat I soon will be
Wid my darlin', my baby—
My Carmen!

And when he does that you know you've heard an opera.

Mr. Hammerstein, the best lyric writer in the business, has done a poet's and a musician's job with the libretto. His incandescent imagination sets your own afire with the first number, a street urchins' chorus titled "Lift 'Em Up and Put 'Em Down," and it keeps you aglow until the final curtain. One almost instantly takes it as a matter of course that Negroes are singing Negro talk to the music of a time-tested classic. The familiar toreador's song becomes Husky Miller's "Stand up and fight, slug toe to toe," and it's just the right thing.

Again, without insult to either the original book or the music, Mr. Hammerstein has contrived humor, as in the quintet titled "Whizzin' Away Along de Track."

Direction Excellent

The stage direction by Hassard Short, the musical direction of Joseph Littau and the orchestral arrangements by Russell Bennett are completely integrated. The big Negro cast is splendid, but the voices of the principals are not the heroic emissions of the strutters and yellers of traditional grand opera. They are all good, but not great in the sense of size. The whole production, therefore, is keyed to normal performances, and I think this is a delight. It makes everybody seem human—and there are precious few human grand opera characters.

There are two singers each for the roles of Carmen, Joe and Cindy Lou. Last night's Carmen, Muriel Smith, is the best one I ever saw. She is believably sensuous and not just a strutter. She can sing and, believe me, she can act. She's a camera store clerk from Philadelphia and this is her first stage appearance.

Last night's Joe was Luther Saxon, and he made of Joe an appealing guy. Saxon was a checker in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Carlotta Franzell, as the torch-singing Cindy Lou, got several hands last night. And big, dominant and quite wonderful as Husky Miller is Glenn Bryant, a New York cop on leave.

Who says the theatre is falling apart, when it can find talent in navy yards, shops and station houses?

The choruses, as one might guess because they are Negro voices, are superb—better than any I ever heard at the Met. The ballets, staged by Eugene Loring, are remarkable even in a season of remarkable ballets, and have boundless humor and invention.

And, finally, the sets and costumes, by two masters named Howard Bay and Raoul Pene duBois, are sheer dream stuff.

Billy Rose, my hat is off to you and I bow low.

'CARMEN JONES'

By Oscar Hammerstein 2d. Presented by Billy Rose at the Broadway Theater December 2, 1943. Music by Georges Bizet. Staged by Hassard Short. Libretto directed by Charles Friedman. Orchestral arrangement by Robert Russell Bennett. Settings by Howard Bay. Costumes by Raoul Pene duBois. Choreography by Eugene Loring. Choral direction by Robert Shaw. Orchestra directed by Joseph Littau. The cast:

Corporal Morrell	Napoleon Reed
Foreman	Robert Clarke
Cindy Lou	Carlotta Franzell or Elton J. Warren
Sergt. Brown	Jack Carr
Joe	Luther Saxon or Napoleon Reed
Carmen	Muriel Smith or Muriel Rahn
Sally	Sibol Cain
T-Bone	Edward Roche
Tough Kid	William Jones
Drummer	Cosy Cole
Bartender	Melvin Howard
Waiter	Edward Christopher
Frankie	June Hawkins
Myrt	Jessica Russell
Rum	Edward Lee Tyler
Dink	Dick Montgomery
Husky Miller	Glenn Bryant
Soldiers	Robert Clarke, William Woolfolk, George Willis, Elijah Hodges
Mr. Higgins	P. Jay Sidney
Miss Higgins	Fredye Marshall
Photographer	Alford Pierre
Card Players	Urylee Leonardos, Ethel White, Sibol Cain
Girl from Cuba Libra Club	Ruth Crompton
Poncho	William Dillard
Dancing Boxers	Sheldon B. Hoskins, Randolph Sawyer
Bullett Head	Melvin Howard
Referee	Tony Fleming Jr.

NEW YORK POST
December 3, 1943

"Carmen Jones," a New Version of the Opera, at the Broadway

By WILELLA WALDORF

BILLY ROSE, of all people, is the latest impressario to do some experimenting with opera-in-English. His new production, "Carmen Jones," arrived last night at the Broadway Theatre and turned out to be a half-and-half affair. The opera was pretty bad. The English was good, some of it hilarious.

When the show was first announced nearly everbody assumed that what Mr. Rose was producing was a sort of "Hot Carmen." This is not the case. The Bizet music, though naturally cut and somewhat rearranged, is treated with due respect. Robert Russell Bennett has done the arranging and there's a large orchestra to play it under Joseph Littau's direction, and a chorus well trained by Robert Shaw.

The trouble with "Carmen Jones" as opera is that none of the leading singers is more than passable, vocally or dramatically, and some of them are entirely unable to cope with Bizet. The orchestra had to be toned down a good deal to give them a chance to be heard at all.

Carlotta Franzell as Cindy Lou (Micaela) and Luther Saxon as Joe (Don Jose) were intermittently effective, but Muriel Smith as Carmen Jones, who works in a parachute factory in the South, found all of the music quite beyond her, while Glenn Bryant as Husky Miller, the prize fighter (once Escamillo the toreador), made a towering figure, but didn't do much with his famous aria, which now has convulsing words thought up by Mr. Hammerstein.

Wonderful to Look At

Since "Carmen Jones" presents its more serious operatic scenes operatically, they are sometimes very hard to take. You can see just as stiff acting at the Metropolitan, where the singing is generally much better.

We were thrown back, therefore, on the less grand operatic moments, and found them very enjoyable. Hassard Short, aided by Howard Bay's attractive scenery, and costumes by Raoul Pene duBois that knock your eye out, has made "Carmen Jones" something to look at, even if it isn't always something to listen to.

Oscar Hammerstein's lyrics for the famous "Carmen" songs that everybody can hum are so neatly done that we wish Mr. Hammerstein would take the trouble sometime to do a "straight" English version of grand opera. It would be a relief after the sort of "It is the umbrella of my grandfather" translation one is usually handed under the guise of "opera in English."

"Carmen Jones" begins at the Southern parachute factory where Joe is a military policeman, and progresses through Billy Pastor's Cafe to a swanky Chicago country club and finally to the Sports Stadium where Husky Miller is fighting the Brazilian champ.

Luring Joe away from Cindy Lou, Carmen sings insinuatingly,

"Dere's a cafe on the corner,
Run by my frien,' Billy Pastor,
Dere's no way to know jus' how far
I will go if I has ter!"

Billy Pastor's place is quite a joint, where Cosy Cole plays the drums, the colored folks dance and Husky Miller operates on the famous toreador song:

"Stan' up and fight until you hear de bell,
Stan' toe to toe,
Trade blow fer blow! . . ."

When the quintette starts chugging up and down before the footlights imitating a train to Chicago, it's all pretty funny, partly because Mr. Hammerstein's words are comic, partly because it's amusing to hear a bunch of breezy, Negro performers singing them to tunes hitherto associated with the grand opera house.

In other words, most of the hilarity of "Carmen Jones" is based on a burlesque of grand opera although Bizet's music itself is not "swung," nor otherwise kicked around.

Toreador Burlesque

This is why we found Mr. Rose's experiment a half-and-half affair. The burlesque of opera was funny. The opera itself was not good enough to be taken seriously, yet it was supposed to be.

Mr. Loring's dance arrangements helped a good deal at Billy Pastor's, but we didn't care for his idea of putting on a toreador burlesque in the Chicago country club scene. It reminded us too much of "Carmen," the opera, which we weren't hearing.

The whole country club scene, in fact, struck us as a poor substitute for the smugglers' den. Carmen's fortune telling lost its effectiveness against such a background, and so did the music generally.

Lest it be suggested by anybody who doesn't agree with us—there will be plenty—that we insist upon "Carmen" in its original form, it might be well to add that the most brilliantly effective version of the opera we ever saw was not "Carmen" at all, but "Carmencita and the Soldier," done here, in Russian, some years ago by the Musical Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre.

"Carmen Jones"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 3, 1943

Bravo!

By HOWARD BARNES

THE theater and music have had a memorable wedding in "Carmen Jones." This new Billy Rose production at the Broadway is as wonderful and exciting as it is audacious. It retains the score of the celebrated Bizet opera, but it clothes it with such miraculous showmanship that for once drama takes its rightful place in a music drama. The libretto has been brilliantly translated by Oscar Hammerstein 2d into a contemporary Negro fable. It is magnificently performed and ably sung by an all-colored cast, and it has been staged with cunning and splendor. "Carmen Jones" is something more than a major theatrical event. It opens infinite and challenging horizons for the fusion of two art forms.

Those who may have feared that an operatic classic was being violated can rest assured that no such thing has happened. Hammerstein has retained every mood and movement of a tortured romance in his book, giving it immediate meaning and dramatic force. He has written lusty and intelligible lyrics, which are superbly suited to the new Negro idiom of the work. Meanwhile the original score is threaded through the show with such extraordinary effect that it is quite as felicitous as it ever was in an opera house. What matters is that "Carmen Jones" is not "Carmen," but what "Carmen" might have been had it achieved a more perfect balance of theater, spectacle, song and dancing in the first place.

A whole job of showmanship has rarely been more inspired and successful. Hassard Short has done a masterly job of over-all directing, giving color, variety and significant action to the five scenes in the offering. Howard Bay's imaginative settings have been matched to perfection by Raoul Pene duBois's brilliant costumes. Eugene Loring's dance routines are something to remember for a long time, while Charles Friedman has staged the libretto so that there is not one moment of grand opera posturing in the proceedings. The principals sing and act with enthusiasm, and the ensemble numbers are always striking and beautiful.

In its transmutation from a Spanish to a Negro legend one might have expected jarring notes in "Carmen Jones." Instead, the tale of impassioned love, jealousy and death seems utterly right as it is now interpolated with the Bizet music. The seductress becomes a worker in a Southern parachute factory, her lover deserts from the army to follow the fickle wench to Chicago, she takes up with a prizefighter and is killed at the very moment of the knockout in a sports stadium. In the same manner, the lyrics fit the tunes immaculately, the "Toreador Song" becoming "Stan' Up and Fight," the famous quintet emerging as "Whizzin' Away Along de Track" and "Habanera" verbally recoined as "Dat's Love." Hammerstein demonstrated conclusively that he was one of the great librettists of our time in "Oklahoma." He adds proof to his artistry here.

There are scenes of rich humor in the show, passages of romantic eloquence and moments of genuinely moving tragedy. The company deserves a large share of credit for this. Luther Saxon plays Joe, the love-sick deserter, with intensity and feeling and sings his arias and duets well, if not superbly. Muriel Smith, in the title role, is excellent; Edward Lee Tyler and Dick Montgomery do some fabulous clowning and Cosy Cole beats out some hot licks on a drum, in a cabaret scene. Best of the vocalists, though, is Carlotta Franzell as Cindy Lou, the girl that Joe left behind him. Her aria, "My Joe," is as lovely singing as you will often hear. The orchestra last night was not always with the cast, but generally speaking, it played admirably under Joseph Littau's baton. "Carmen Jones" is altogether a triumphant show. For some of us skeptics it shows that the opera form is not as moribund as we suspected. In any case it is superlative entertainment.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 3, 1943

Arresting Fantasy Fills Carmen Jones

By ALTON COOK

BILLY ROSE'S gambling imagination has struck pay dirt in another unexplored region. The opening of his Carmen Jones at the Broadway last night poured out a rich flow of melody, humor, color—all the elements that go into one of the liveliest and most spirited Negro musical shows you ever saw. It is opera, all right—opera with the addition of a wild, primitive charm.

Oscar Hammerstein 2nd has grafted a new libretto onto the battered old tragedy of the Bizet Carmen, putting the whole thing into Negro talk and a modern setting. Don't mistake the meaning of the description, Negro talk. There is no suggestion of jive or other caricature. This is intended as poetic drama, something in the spirit of Porgy or Porgy and Bess. A restrengthened poignance and an altogether new humorous undertone has been written into the old story.

The use as much of the Bizet music as they need, but strictly from the arias. The recitative have been dropped altogether. No swing tricks are allowed to get in and heat up the old music. The music is sung simply and straightforwardly with neither operatic nor jazz flourishes.

The Habanera acquires a queer new appeal sung in homely dialect with such words as "Love's a baby dat grows up wild . . . Love ain' nobody's angel child and he won' pay any mind to you." The Seguidilla becomes "Dere's a Cafe on de Corner."

The principal arias are all there. Surprisingly enough, the words that seem to be so incongruous fit into the mood of the music thoroughly, frequently adding a new vitality. A ripple of whimsical amusement runs over the audience now and then, but the words never seem grotesque in their high-tone settings.

Bizet's original Carmen is now Carmen Jones, a girl who works in a parachute factory guarded by soldiers. Don Jose has been transformed into Cpl. Joe and the toreador's name, Escamillo, is suggested by Husky Miller, a prize fighter in the new version. That will give you an idea of the modifications imposed on the general outlines of the familiar tragedy of the faithless Carmen stabbed by hopeless Cpl. Joe when she leaves him for Husky Miller.

From nooks and crannies all over the land Billy Rose and company dug up a set of Negroes who can sing and dance very well and act as well as they need to. Most of the principles have had little or no experience on the stage.

Muriel Smith, the girl who plays Carmen, is a miraculous discovery—a swivel-hipped, sensuous beauty, full of the flavor of hariotry on the glamorous side and possessor of a beautiful soprano voice. This is her very first stage job. Cpl. Joe is played with a touching sincerity by Luther Saxon, another comparative newcomer on the stage. Carlotta Franzell sings in a sweet little voice the arias Bizet intended for Micaela. During the run these three, who sang last night, will alternate with, respectively, Muriel Rahn, Napoleon Reed and Elton J. Warren.

The cast has a great number of good people—the imposing baritone of Glenn Bryant as Husky Miller and a comical pair, Edward Lee Tyler and Dick Montgomery. A resounding, full-throated chorus fills the background of both music and drama.

One of Carmen Jones' operatic trappings is a ballet. This is by no means a travesty of the usual opera ballet, but the style is full of a sly, sprightly spirit of fun. A gang of prankish kids do a wonderful version of the changing-of-the-guard mockery in the first act.

Howard Bay's settings are gaily extravagant in color, exactly the sort for the otherworldly fancy of the whole production. One in particular, a gaudy Negro country club, is a marvelous combination of gala beauty and humor. Hassard Short has performed a remarkable achievement both in the individual scenes with his inexperienced players and in the complexly animated ensemble numbers.

All of Carmen Jones is such a startling and unexpected departure from anything you ever saw before, the whole thing has the air of a dream production, a mighty nice dream, too.

NEW YORK SUN
December 3, 1943

Billy Rose Presents 'Carmen Jones' at the Broadway Theater

By HERRICK BROWN

BILLY ROSE, always one with an eye for something spectacular and new, brought "Carmen Jones," Oscar Hammerstein 2d's streamlined, up-to-the-minute version of the Bizet opera "Carmen" onto the stage of the Broadway Theater last evening, gave it a lavish production with a huge all-Negro cast and thereby presented the town with a novelty that is definitely out of the top drawer.

Some of the devotees of Mr. Rose's Diamond Horseshoe are going to be startled, no doubt, to find him sponsoring anything leaning quite so definitely to the serious side. They may even be a little aggrieved about it after visiting the Broadway. And at the opposite pole some opera lovers may feel that the changes Mr. Hammerstein has wrought border closely on sacrilege. A lot of other people, however, are going to spend a thoroughly enjoyable evening at Mr. Rose's show. These will certainly include, too, plenty of persons who have delighted in "Carmen," sung and played straight, and the latter will have the added fun of seeing just how adroitly Mr. Hammerstein has paralleled the original.

In transferring the locale of the opera from Spain to America and substituting Chicago for Madrid in the final part, and the prize ring for the bull fighting arena, Mr. Hammerstein has stuck close to the initial story. However, in "Carmen Jones," Don Jose has become plain Joe, a corporal in the military police; Escamillo of the bull ring is Husky Miller, a boxer de luxe; and Carmen, now surnamed Jones, a flirtatious and hip-swaying girl worker in a parachute factory down South. In the new version, too, the recitatives of the opera have been changed into dialogue. The ever melodious Bizat score has been retained, however, and there are no modern interpolations.

Mr. Hammerstein has done a splendid job in translating the libretto and lyrics into Negro dialect, with plenty of Harlemesque touches. He has succeeded admirably too in making the gayety and the tragedy truly that of the Negro race while preserving the essential spirit of the original opera. The old arias bob up under strange new titles, of course. "The Toreador's Song" has become "Stan' Up and Fight"; Carmen's "Card Song," "Dat Ol' Boy," and the quintet, "Whizzin' Along the Track," with Bizet's music fitting beautifully into the rhythm of a train.

The singing of the cast of 115, principals and chorus alike, is capital, even if all of it may not be of Metropolitan caliber. It is the plan of the management to have alternates in the roles of Carmen, Joe, and the latter's jilted girl friend. (She's Cindy Lou now.) Muriel Smith was the Carmen last evening and she set a high mark for Muriel Rahn, who is also listed for the part, to shoot at. Vivacious, a good actress, and with a fine voice, she made her role outstanding. Luther Saxon, singing Joe, was a trifle shaky in his acting, but there was nothing wrong with his singing. Carlotta Franzell, last evening's Cindy Lou, won a well-deserved ovation for last act lover's lament, now labeled "My Joe." Glenn Bryant, strapping of frame and powerful of voice, made a good Husky Miller. Credit Mayor LaGuardia and Commissioner Valentine with an assist here, for Mr. Bryant is a New York policeman granted a leave to make his stage debut. The singing of the chorus, excellent throughout, reached its climax in "Dat's Our Man," sung outside the stadium. The members of the ensemble can really dance, too, and how they did strut in the cafe scene as Cosy Cole rattled the sticks for the colorful and swift moving "Beat Out That Rhythm on a Drum" number. There is a beautiful second act ballet, too.

"Carmen Jones" like most operas is not long on humor, but there is plenty to look at if not to laugh at. Hassard Short has done the staging, and done it superbly, with imagination and color and his genius at lighting. Howard Bay's settings and the costumes, designed by Raoul Pene duBois, are lovely to see also. The result is as complete a delight to the eye as the music is to the ear.

Mark down "Carmen Jones" as a brilliant idea brilliantly carried out.

"Carmen Jones"

NEW YORK TIMES
December 3, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Carmen Jones"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BILLY ROSE is a little man with gigantic ideas, which at suitable intervals explode over the city like a burst of fireworks. The display last evening was one of the greatest of them all, for Billy brought to the Broadway Theatre the work called "Carmen Jones," which has the Bizet music for "Carmen," an all-Negro cast and a new version of the opera's libretto by Oscar Hammerstein 2d. It is beautifully done in every way, with gay colors and gay ballets, and singers who can sing as though they meant it and were on the stage for business. Since it is an opera under discussion, just call it wonderful, quite wonderful.

• • •

Since he is not one to throw down a friend, Billy's initial attempt to set up shop alongside the Metropolitan has spared no pains. To arrange the music—not changing it, by the way—there is Russell Bennett. To design the settings there is Howard Bay, and for the costumes, which resemble nothing so much as the rainbow this side of the pot of gold, Raoul Pene duBois. Robert Shaw, who has been spectacular as the director of the Collegiate Chorale, has directed the choruses, who sing as though their lives depended on it, as they probably do. And for general supervisor, there is Hassard Short, who in addition to everything else can make lights behave as though pressing a button started a major miracle.

In making his new adaptation, Mr. Hammerstein also has kept within striking distance of the original Meilhac and Halevy adaptation of Merimee's "Carmen." The original was in Spain; Mr. Hammerstein has changed that to southern United States, in a parachute factory which "use ter be a cigarette fac'ry before de war"—if the purists must have an explanation of the end of "Carmen's" cigarette factory. The opera's Don Jose now is plain Joe; Micaela has become Cindy Lou; Escamillo, the toreador, is Husky Miller, a prize fighter, and Lillas Pastia is Billy Pastor, night-club king. But the story is the same: The flower, the cards, the death of Carmen Jones at the end. Whereas, Don Jose was in disgrace from his regiment, Joe is AWOL from his.

Mr. Hammerstein has not written a parody in any sense, but simply a parallel. Many of his lyrics are light, but there are no Broadway gags, and only one or two ultra-modern, or 1943, things have crept in. In the original, the Toreador Song describes the excitement of a bull fight; as it now is sung under the title of "Stan Up An' Fight," it describes a battle in the ring. Mr. Hammerstein has taken the plot of an opera, has matched it scene by scene, but has neither bowed down before it with diffidence nor used it as the basis for a literary prank. It is quite a libretto he has turned out.

• • •

To sing the main roles, Mr. Rose—with the assistance of John Hammond Jr., an expert on Negro singers and players—has acquired some excellent people. For Cindy Lou there are Carlotta Franzell and Elton J. Warren, who will alternate, with the former last evening singing, on the whole, charmingly. Luther Saxon was Joe at the opening performance, a Joe who has a good voice but is not a finished actor; and Muriel Smith was Carmen Jones. She looked sultry, had a fine swagger and dangerous smile and a voice that matched the part. Back of the principles were a perfect chorus, trained to the last and final degree.

• • • •

But even aside from the words and the music, "Carmen Jones" is quite a show. It is dressed in the most variegated costumes of the year, as though Mr. du Bois's paints went mad in the best possible taste. There is a ballet or two contributed by Eugene Loring, with his tongue in his cheek, the dancers being cheerful and fast. There even is a night-club scene, which Billy, as the master of them, could steal for an enterprise of his own elsewhere. As Carmen and Joe sing the "Dere's a Cafe on de Corner," which used to be the Seguidilla; or as Don Jose's Flower Song comes out as "Dis Flower," or the Card Song as "Dat Ol' Boy," going to the theatre seems again one of the necessities of life.

In cutting the cards this time, Billy did not pick the nine of spades, which spelled death to Carmen.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 3, 1943

'Carmen Jones' Is a Fine Exciting Show

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ALL IN ALL, *Carmen Jones* is a delight. Out of Bizet's well-nigh perfect opera—with its brilliant music and its vivid story—has come an exciting and richly colored show. The music seems to me altogether at home in it, and the revised book—dealing with present-day Negroes in a Southern town—gives the famous tale fresh qualities of theater. I had been a trifle frightened that ***Carmen Jones*** might, without meaning to, exploit its Negroes in a facile primitivism and violence. But even its melodrama is essentially dignified and serious. By a coincidence, the season's two finest offerings deal with two black men, two soldiers, who love not wisely but too well and murder the women they love.

Oscar Hammerstein's book for ***Carmen Jones*** transposes the opera along simple and engagingly dramatic lines. The main plot and characters, barring time and place, remain the same. Carmen is a war worker in a parachute factory; Don Jose is an MP corporal named Joe; Micaela is a country girl named Cindy Lou; and Escamillo, the toreador, is a prizefighter named Husky Miller. The inn of the opera becomes a night club in the show, and offers a fine chance for some wonderful hot dancing. In place of the smugglers' den everybody goes to a Chicago country club on the eve of Husky's big fight. The story retains all its animality—Muriel Smith (who has the makings of a very good actress) plays Carmen with a lustful, taunting arrogance.

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Mr. Hammerstein's lyrics are fresh and clean-cut—at times humorous, at times poignant in their simplicity—as in Cindy Lou's big aria. It is a bit of a shock, as well as a bit amusing, to hear the Toreador's Song banged out with "Stand up and fight until you hear the bell"; but the song is none the worse for it.

Much of the virtue of ***Carmen Jones*** lies in the staging. Hassard Short has given it a fine, unconfused movement, brilliant lighting and vivid color effects. Eugene Loring's choreography is uneven, but has some fine things in it, particularly the night-club stuff and the wonderful takeoff of Spanish dancing that opens the second-act ballet (the rest of the ballet doesn't live up to it). Howard Bay's sets and Raoul Pene du Bois's costumes are good and colorful.

John Hammond, Jr., has discovered some good people for the show. Besides Muriel Smith as Carmen, there is Carlotta Franzell, who makes a touching and charming Cindy Lou. Luther Saxon plays Joe with a quiet sincerity, and Glenn Bryant is suitably gigantic as Husky.

Carmen Jones is a real show. By comparison with what follows, the first scene is self-conscious and unanimated; but all the rest is swift and alive without being boisterous, and bright without being lurid. And, among other things, ***Carmen Jones*** will make thousands of people familiar with Bizet's superb score almost exactly as it was written—a very different thing from, say, the sugared-up Schubert of a *Blossom Time*.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 3, 1943

Billy Rose Presents All-Colored Cast in New Version of Opera

By ROBERT GARLAND

BILLY ROSE, the erstwhile bantam Barnum, has fetched something fresh, stalwart and exciting onto the more or less stereotyped Broadway scene, "Carmen Jones," which has at long last shown up on Manhattan, is, I am convinced, a memorable milestone in the upward and onward course of the great American showshop. In theatrical history it will go down as something fresh, imaginative and, for the most part, hitherto unattempted in the theatre of today.

Working hand-in-hand with some of the outstanding talents in the hard-boiled business of make-believe, Mr. Rose—excuse it, Billy!—walked right up to the "Carmen" of Georges Bizet, out of Prosper Merimee's romance, and as good as said: "You're a great story and an even greater operetta, let's get together and turn out a show."

They got together! They turned out a show! This show was displayed last night at the Broadway Theatre before a huge and "Carmen"-minded audience, after triumphant tryout performances in Philadelphia and Boston. Today's report is that the huge and "Carmen"-minded audience lost both its heart and head to the new arrival. With an all-colored cast, an intelligible American (God be praised!) libretto, and an expanded title, "Carmen" is not only a great, but a stirring operetta.

It is also a resounding hit!

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What Billy Rose has done—aided, abetted and rallied around wholeheartedly by Hassard Short, responsible for staging, lighting and color schemes; Charles Friedman, responsible for direction of the libretto; Russell Bennett, responsible for new orchestral arrangements; Howard Bay, responsible for settings; Raoul Pene duBois, responsible for costumes, and Eugene Loring, responsible for choreography—is to turn Georges Bizet's "Carmen" back into the operetta it was originally.

And, first and foremost, the Oscar Hammerstein II—he of "Show Boat," "Oklahoma," and the successful rest of them—who has translated, adapted and pretty generally Americanized the Meilhac-Halevy libretto so that, at Broadway and 53rd Street, it is once again a thrilling, human and altogether three-dimensional retelling of the eternal triangle.

Carmen is now Carmen Jones, a tough and tantalizing female of the species working in a North Carolina factory that has, for the duration of the war, turned from cigarets to parachutes. Don Jose is now Joe. And still a soldier! Escamillo is now a prize-fighting champion known to patrons of the ring as Husky Miller. And Michaela is now one Cindy Lou, but still a village maiden. As for the story—the unquenchable love-versus-passion narrative—that remains fundamentally the same.

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It's a good story. It always will be!

These afternoons and evenings at the Broadway Theatre, "Carmen," as "Carmen Jones," must be judged as the operetta it was in the first place. Remember, please, that when produced at the Opera Comique in Paris it was a musical play, just as it now is at the Broadway. The recitatives, added by an alien hand and over the dead body of Georges Bizet, have been removed. If you want to hear them, you'll have to drop in some night at our local opera house.

As retold in the lovely dialect of our North Carolina colored people, "Carmen" is a sheer delight to the ear. And, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it is completely credible. As no less a music critic than Fredrich Wilhelm Nietzsche pointed out after seeing and hearing "Carmen" for the twentieth time, "Carmen" has a whole lot of Africa in it.

Last night, Billy Rose—Impresario Rose, really—put his best cast forward. Still remembering that "Carmen Jones" is operetta, Muriel Smith is everything she should be as the bewitching Southern so-and-so. Carlotta Franzell is a mettlesome and sympathetic Cindy Lou (Michaela); Luther Saxon is a personable and believable Joe (Don Jose), and Glenn Bryant is a huge and handsome Husky Miller (Escamillo). The production is stunningly pictorial; the orchestra is grand.

If I seem to be highly enthusiastic about "Carmen Jones," I am. As seen and heard at the Broadway Theatre, it's a great operetta, a great show and a great theatrical achievement on the part of Billy Rose!

"Lovers and Friends"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 30, 1943

Wasted Radiance

By HOWARD BARNES

WHILE Dodie Smith has written a rich and pliable part for Katharine Cornell in "Lovers and Friends," she has not backed it up with much of a play. Miss Cornell is more radiant than ever at the Plymouth. As co-producer of the new offering, she has surrounded herself with fine and celebrated players and a meticulous mise-en-scene. The catch is that there is so little heart or meaning in the work that she is forever expending her allure and artistry on trivial conversation and hollow scenes. Her very presence in "Lovers and Friends" defines it as something of a theatrical event, but it leaves a great deal to be desired.

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What is missing must always have been missing in the drama itself. The author has composed a rather trite and turgid story and then tried to force it into a stage pattern. The action, thanks to a prologue and epilogue, stretches from 1918 to 1942, but the bulk of it is concentrated in a gracious London drawing room in 1930. There you will discover some of the dullest romantic complications that ever attempted to invest a bit of human experience with comedy and pathos. Even Miss Cornell has not been able to give more than a touch or two of emotional conviction to a triangle which develops into a quadrangle and then blithely skips the whole business.

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Miss Smith might have done better, I think, had she made her piece an out-and-out drawing-room comedy. The scenes in which Miss Cornell is given brilliant clowning assistance by Henry Daniell are funny and worth seeing. Those in which Carol Goodner makes wry observations on the marital and romantic tangle of the tale are witty and sometimes wise. When the chief actress and Raymond Massey are threshing out a problem of emotional reorientation at middle age, the show is stuffy, lacking in valid dramatic premises and highly inconclusive. Talk can be the backbone and substance of a play, but it should prove brighter than that you will hear tossed about in the serious passages of "Lovers and Friends."

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To the great credit of Miss Cornell, she almost pulls the random ramifications of the play into a plausible unity. She brings beauty, warmth and a range of expression to succeeding scenes. From the young actress who is swept into a happy marriage in 1918, only to find it crashing twelve years later, she fills a stage portrait with serenity, humor and even poignance. It is no fault of hers that she cannot make the serio-farcical predicaments of "Lovers and Friends" more than intermittently absorbing. Daniell, as already noted, is splendid as the playwright who comes to the matron's assistance when she is about to be abandoned, and Anne Burr is good as the chit who snares the matron's solid husband briefly. Massey, it is my duty to report, is far behind them in saving fragments of a poor play. The staging by Guthrie McClintic and the sets and costumes by Motley, incidentally, are both superior.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 30, 1943

Katharine Cornell Opens in New Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

"SO WHAT?" would be a fitting title for the new importation Katharine Cornell, in association with John C. Wilson, brought overseas and put on display last night at the Plymouth Theatre. But Dodie Smith, the playwright, has seen fit to call it "Lovers and Friends," while Miss Cornell, Raymond Massey and a quart of well-known assisting players have seen fit to act it out in 45th st., West of the Shubert Alley.

You will remember this Dodie Smith as author of "Autumn Crocus," which introduced Francis Lederer, the bouncing Czech, to these United States; "Call It a Day," featuring Philip Merivale and Gladys Cooper, and "Dear Octopus," details of which have escaped my memory.

Well, this time Smith who was christened Dodie has turned out a would-be high-comedy which, if last night's hearing is believing, is neither very high nor very comic, dealing in detail with between-wars Londoners about whom you do not give a hang. I don't give a hang about them, at any rate, and, if audience reaction counts for anything, the initial congregation shares wholeheartedly in my disinterest.

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Four-Sided Triangle

Out in the lobby, between acts two and three, I overheard a first-nighter remark that "Lovers and Friends" is "nothing but a four-sided triangle." And that's precisely what it is. Following a prologue laid in Regent's Park in the Spring of 1918, Rodney Boswell gets himself engaged to Stella. She, you gather from their conversation, is pinch-hitting for a girl named Lennie. Result—matrimony.

You next meet Rodney and Stella in mid-July, 1930, happily married and habitating a handsome house overlooking the Regent's Park in which they got themselves engaged. Enter Martha Jones, secretary to one Edmund Alexander, London's justly celebrated dramatist. Also Cupid!

So Rodney falls in love with Martha, telling Stella all about it. And, as scenes roll on, Stella falls out of love with Rodney and into love with Edmund. As for Martha, she turns out to be a witch in working-girl's clothing, riding roughshod over everybody on her broomstick. To bring matters to some sort of a conclusion, Rodney falls out of love with Martha and back into love with Stella, while Lennie obligingly takes on the playwright. Is everybody happy? Yes, indeed!

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None Too Significant

If all this sounds none too dramatically significant, that's the way it sounds when seen and heard—in three acts, six scenes, a prologue and an epilogue — inside the four walls of the Plymouth Theatre. Unlike the same author's "Call It a Day," which I look back upon as human and three dimensional, you just can't manage to work up a whole lot of interest in the two-dimensional characters newly arrived in 45th st.

As Stella Boswell, the wife who can make up neither her own nor her husband's mind, Katharine Cornell is attractive to the eye, impressive to the ear and as talented as ever. But, after you've spent a dozen on-stage years with her Stella Boswell, you still don't give a hang about her.

Raymond Massey, as Rodney Boswell makes the Masseyish most of a thankless part. Carol Goodner as Lennie, Anne Burr as Martha and Henry Daniell, no longer a crimeless murderer, as Edmund Alexander, give out the best that's in them. But, if "Lovers and Friends" manages to achieve a run, it will be because of Miss Cornell's momentum as an actress. More power to it. To the momentum, I mean. Not the play!

NEW YORK POST
November 30, 1943

Katharine Cornell Returns In "Lovers and Friends"

By WILELLA WALDORF

"LOVERS AND FRIENDS," presented last night at the Plymouth Theatre, is Katharine Cornell's first new play in five years. Since she appeared in S. N. Behrman's "No Time for Comedy" she has given Broadway some distinguished revivals—Shaw's "Candida" and "The Doctor's Dilemma," and Chekhov's "The Three Sisters."

It may as well be admitted at once that we found the leap from Shaw and Chekhov to Dodie Smith a bit jarring.

Dodie Smith wrote "Autumn Crocus," "Call It a Day" and "Dear Octopus," as well as a number of other works produced abroad. She has a certain facility for creating nice, comfortable Englishmen and women, and now and then she comes forth with an amusing line.

But her plots are so conventional, so predictable every second of the way that it is a little startling to find an actress-manager as eminent as Miss Cornell throwing herself and an expert company into something as essentially trivial as this.

Enter "The Other Woman"

"Lovers and Friends" bears the same relation to drama that an expensively got up, slick paper magazine serial bears to literature. It provides Miss Cornell with the role of a happily married woman, mother of eleven-year-old twins, who is informed by her husband one evening that he is in love with a girl named Martha Jones.

He wants a divorce so that he may marry Martha, who is far too honorable to indulge in a mere affair. The wife and the other woman meet stagily in the middle of the second act and there is a conversation that we are quite certain the author considers intensely modern and civilized, even just a wee bit daring.

But there is never the slightest doubt in the mind of anybody in the audience who has ever seen a Dodie Smith play before—or shall we simply say, who has ever seen a play before—that anything not on the old stencil is going to occur. There is a prologue in Regent's Park in 1918, when Miss Cornell meets Raymond Massey (in uniform, of course.) The three acts of the other-woman drama take place in 1930. Then there's an epilogue in 1942, again the Park.

An Excellent Cast

Miss Cornell, who is joined as a producer on this occasion by John C. Wilson, has given this meagre little play her most careful attention. Guthrie McClintic has staged it with much homely detail—such as blowing dust off a copy of Rupert Brooke casually taken from a bookshelf. The Motleys have designed a Regency drawing room that is spacious and charming, plus a bit of the Park by way of prologue and epilogue.

Miss Cornell is her glamorous, always fascinating self, going through the motions of pretending that this is all something pretty special, with Mr. Massey still looking quite a lot like Lincoln and trying his best to seem less of a fool than his part makes him out to be.

Carol Goodner as an actress-friend and Henry Daniell as a playwright-friend are both delightful people to have around, and Anne Burr struggles with the role of the secretary who has lured away a hitherto blameless husband. Dodie Smith always stacks the cards against "other women" and this one is no exception.

She doesn't actually come out just before the final curtain and announce that the poor girl suffers from leprosy, moral degeneracy and halitosis, but she does indicate delicately that she is the female equivalent of a cad and a bounder, besides being a liar and perhaps just a bit touched in the head.

All Is Forgiven

Despite the fact that our reaction to all this was an intense desire to rise solemnly and ejaculate "Tosh!" in a genteel tone, we do realize in a dim sort of way that Miss Cornell must have been very eager to tackle a new play after all those revivals, and since she has often devoted herself so whole-heartedly to the classics, it is certainly her privilege to act in just about anything she cares to at this juncture.

"Lovers and Friends" is sure to have a long run and make a great deal of money for everybody concerned, a happy state of affairs, since producing plays on Broadway these days is a big business proposition.

When it has eventually run its course, we trust the actress-manager will use some of the profits to put on another impressive revival, new plays apparently being very, very scarce.

"Lovers and Friends"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 30, 1943

Miss Cornell Enlivens A Long Evening

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN recent seasons Katharine Cornell has generously given us Chekhov and Shaw, so I suppose one cannot begrudge her Dodie Smith. In any case, she is with us again in a very large role that should please her very large following. As for Dodie Smith, she keeps right on, come fire, come famine, pretending that her paper dolls are real, pretending that they are sexy, involving them in courtships and infatuations, and extricating them from the wrong arms by 11:15. She could just as well extricate them by 10:45, but Dodie Smith believes in big portions.

So here are Miss Cornell and Mr. Massey meeting in 1918 and falling out of love with two other people in order to fall in love with each other. Here they are again in 1930, happily married until Mr. Massey is bewitched by a priggish young lady, and wants a divorce; and by the time he discovers the young lady is a fraud, Miss Cornell has found solace in a pompous young playwright. Whatever will they do? we ask, as the third-act curtain descends on a teasing note. Well, there is an epilogue laid in 1942, and Miss Cornell—now gone gray at the temples—is still at the old address.

I can't remember when somebody wasn't telling this story on the stage; I suppose it's what we mean, in a way, by the theater. Dodie Smith tells it as well or badly as the next person, with all the scenes you expect and all the speeches you remember, with touches of humor and sentiment, and with a fine antiquated up-to-dateness in her treatment of sex. Her people go in for an awful lot of it, but somehow their hearts don't seem to be in it and you feel they'd really like to curl up in the corner with *Alice in Wonderland* and a cup of Bovril.

Miss Cornell's is a juicy role that enables her to fall twice in love, have two big scenes with her truant husband, and two even bigger ones with the Other Woman. She copes with them quite handsomely. Mr. Massey is a manly and sympathetic Dodie-Smith husband; and Henry Daniell and Anne Burr do well enough in unsympathetic roles. As an actress of many amours, Carol Goodner lightens the evening with a nice brisk performance. Mr. McClintic has directed carefully, but he can't keep *Lovers and Friends* from seeming to go on forever.

'LOVERS AND FRIENDS'

A play by Dodie Smith, produced at the Plymouth Theater by Katharine Cornell and John C. Wilson, November 29, 1942. Staged by Guthrie McClintic. Settings and costumes by Motley.

The cast:

Rodney Boswell	Raymond Massey
Stella	Katharine Cornell
Agnes	Katherine Hynes
Lennie Lorrimer	Carol Goodner
Martha Jones	Anne Burr
Edmund Alexander	Henry Daniell

NEW YORK TIMES
November 30, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Lovers and Friends"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT always is good to find Katharine Cornell on Forty-fifth Street, where, naturally, she belongs. It is even good to find her there in such a play as Dodie Smith's "Lovers and Friends," which she and John C. Wilson produced last evening at the Plymouth. For whatever she does, she does with style, surrounding herself with other players who have the manner, and offering excellent productions. In the present instance that generous habit of Miss Cornell's serves her in good stead, for, taken by itself, her new play would be an insufferable bore. Taken as it must be, however, with Miss Cornell, Raymond Massey, Henry Daniell and the rest, it is a cheerful enough evening of good acting and polite comedy, which will advance the star's career no whit but which will please a good many people.

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To get over the worst of it first Miss Smith is writing about a middle-aged barrister who falls in love with a young, scheming girl, wishing his wife to divorce him so that he can marry her. English comedy set among the teacups and the martinis can be pretty trying, and "Lovers and Friends" is no exception. Instead of one plot there are two, for the wife decides she, in turn, is in love with someone else and almost decides to go to America with him. At the end, in the usual fashion, both husband and wife agree they were mistaken and decide to continue with each other; in an epilogue they have a final laugh about it.

Into this banal matter, Miss Smith has thrown enough good lines to give the players a chance, and as producers Miss Cornell and Mr. Wilson have found the actors to seize upon them. Miss Cornell is, of course, the wife, a former actress now settled down with two sons, a husband, a house and peace. As usual, she gives a performance which finds everything in the part, being gay, hurt, kind, generous—in short, paying as much attention to the affairs of Stella as she would were she playing Juliet. As an actress she does not let either a part or a play down.

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Raymond Massey is the husband-barrister, playing his role with dignity and restraint and allowing no impression to creep in that probably he has had finer things to do in his time. In the part of the novelist-playwright who comes along to complicate the evening by falling in love with the wife, there is Mr. Daniell, who is quite immense. Miss Smith has given him most of the funny lines, and Mr. Daniell's wry humor takes care of them for her. Carol Goodner is an actress friend of the family, a cryptic, casual girl excellently played; and Anne Burr is the young girl who causes all the trouble. Her part is not well defined and becomes a sort of symbol rather than a character.

In directing "Lovers and Friends" Guthrie McClintic has tried not to put too much sugar in the tea, but sometimes he cannot prevent the evening's becoming a little sleepy. The settings and costumes are by Motley, and they are good, and while evening audiences may not care so much, the matinees probably will find a certain amount of envy over the dresses. Last year at this time Miss Cornell was rehearsing "The Three Sisters," and while the Plymouth's guest is not Chekhov, "Lovers and Friends" gives a group of excellent players a fair enough vehicle for their talents.

NEW YORK SUN
November 30, 1943

Katharine Cornell and Raymond Massey Return in 'Lovers and Friends'

By HERRICK BROWN

KATHARINE CORNELL and Raymond Massey returned to the Broadway scene last evening in a new play by Dodie Smith called "Lovers and Friends," which had its premiere at the Plymouth Theater, and what cause there is for rejoicing following that long anticipated event lies chiefly in the fact that Miss Cornell and Mr. Massey are back in town once more.

Unfortunately Miss Smith's play never even approaches the stature of its two chief players, and its main merit is that it affords Miss Cornell an opportunity to create another of her unforgettable stage portraits. In her first modern role since she played in "No Time for Comedy"—and a very long part it is, keeping her on the stage most of the evening—she scores a personal acting triumph over material that is for the most part mediocre and hackneyed. It is easy to believe in and admire Stella Fryor as Miss Cornell brings her to life behind the footlights, but to have the same feeling about "Lovers and Friends" as a play is something else again.

Miss Smith in her story spans two wars. The prologue brings Stella and Rodney Boswell (Mr. Massey) together in Regents Park, London, on a spring evening in 1918. Home from the battle front in France Rodney is waiting there for an actress friend, Lennie Lorrimer. In Lennie's place comes Stella, a fellow actress, to tell him that Lennie has broken the date, and in a scene, which as Miss Cornell and Mr. Massey play it, is one of the most delightful of the whole evening, Stella and Boswell find themselves mutually attracted and love awakening. The epilogue takes them back to the same spot in the spring of 1942 to sum up the years that have gone between.

The main action of the play is laid from May to late autumn in 1930. That year finds Stella and Rodney, long happily married, running into a crisis through the predatory scheming of the ambitious young secretary of Edmund Alexander, a novelist-playwright and a client of Rodney's law firm. Miss Smith takes all of a rambling and talky first act—an act that is a severe letdown after the play's auspicious beginning — to set up the old familiar triangle, and what she unfolds in the two following acts is mainly a retelling of an oft-told story against a charming English drawing room background.

The second act, wherein Rodney informs Stella of his love for the girl secretary and asks for a divorce, contains some scenes of excellent theater, and both Miss Cornell and Mr. Massey make the most of them. To whatever degree Mr. Massey fails to make his explanation of his sudden infatuation convincing, the fault lies with the playwright, not with his acting. Martha Jones, the secretary, as Miss Smith draws her, shallow, prudish and without the slightest glamour, hardly seems at any time the sort of person to attract any one of Rodney's type. This act also supplies Miss Cornell a chance for some superb playing, with the emphasis on restraint, in an interview with the girl.

In the third act Miss Smith suddenly switches from drama to light comedy. By now Stella has resumed her stage career, and Miss Cornell, in a gayer mood, has just about persuaded those out front to believe in Stella's abrupt resignation to losing Rodney and in her budding romance with the novelist-playwright, when drama stalks in once more. Rodney at this point comes home to announce that at long last he has discovered just what a fraud the little secretary really is. Here Miss Smith, left with a dilemma and a crumbling play, takes refuge behind the conveniently falling third act curtain to work out her solution off stage before the epilogue.

Throughout, Miss Cornell, by her sheer artistry, makes Stella a memorable figure, attractive, intelligent and gracious. Mr. Massey's task is more thankless, but fine actor that he is, he contributes to the evening's pleasure by pulling together as best he can a character muddled in the writing. To Henry Daniell falls the role of the novelist, and free at last from villainy for a while, he brings quiet charm to the character of a reticent Englishman. Carol Goodner is breezy and likable as Lennie, who bobs up throughout the proceedings to stand at the side of her old friend, Stella, and Anne Burr is properly stiff as the secretary, which is about all Miss Smith really allows her to be.

Miss Cornell and John C. Wilson have given "Lovers and Friends" an excellent production, and Guthrie McClintic has directed the play skillfully as a whole, although there were a few moments, particularly in the first act, where its pedestrian gait slowed almost to a full stop. Motley has contrived a lovely setting for the major action of the play.

Miss Cornell's many admirers, and Mr. Massey's too, will undoubtedly be grateful to have them playing here at all this season, but they may be pardoned if they heave a nostalgic sigh or two for "Candida" or "The Doctor's Dilemma."

"Lovers and Friends"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 30, 1943

'Lovers and Friends' Is Meager Vehicle for Katharine Cornell

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN the last interlude between scenes at the Plymouth Theatre last night the little pit orchestra played a bit of that song which says something about "a kiss is just a kiss." This was either ungallant or a clever form of drama criticism, for we in the audience were just winding up a whole long evening of Love. A kiss is good for an act with playwright Dodie Smith.

In "Lovers and Friends" Katharine Cornell, Raymond Massey and Henry Daniell bestow great charm and splendid talent upon a play that did not seem worthy of them to this reporter. It is very British, very chin-up, and everybody is oft'ly decent when it comes to falling in love with the wrong party. It is literate and many of its lines are in excellent humor; but it seems like one of those Powerful Novels of Love and How It Affects a Woman's Heart which should be running in a ladies' magazine in twenty-nine installments.

Anyhow, Cornell's Back

"Lovers and Friends," then, looks like a setup for the matinee trade, and I no doubt am a dirty cad for saying so; for the play does bring back one of the theatre's First Actresses, and she, in turn, has given it an excellent production.

Having forsaken the comparative stateliness of Shaw and Chekhov, Miss Cornell finds herself in a play about a woman of warm affection—a play which starts with a prologue in World War I and finishes with an epilogue in World War II. In World War I she has just been jilted, but she finds Raymond Massey in a London park. Mr. Massey, in turn, has just been jilted by Miss Cornell's best friend, Carol Goodner. So it's love at first sight between Mr. M. and Miss C.

This goes along quietly for years. Then the forthright Raymond falls in love with a wench and he is so honest he has to blab about it to his wife. They talk it over for a while. Then the wife and the wench talk it over. Then the wife falls in love with a playwright (Mr. Daniell) and he and she talk it over.

Off They Go Again

Then Mr. Massey finds he isn't in love with the wench any more, and again he tells Miss Cornell. This louses up her romance with Mr. Daniell, but she gets over it in three years and the last we see of her she's in the park again, still comfortably married to Massey. And Daniell is comfortably wed to Miss Goodner.

The moral, if any, must be that if you're married you'd better have the good sense to stay stuck with it.

Miss Cornell's performance is, it goes without saying, intelligent and, within the limits of the script, compelling. Massey has frankness and charm, although I don't think he can be very fond of his last scene. Henry Daniell has a fine, dry comedy sense in his role of a formidable playwright, and Miss Goodner, as a woman of unstable affections, has some amusing moments. Anne Burr does all right with the rather thankless part of the wench.

Guthrie McClintic directed. A London drawing room set by Motley is handsome.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 30, 1943

Lovers and Friends A Cornell Hit

By ALTON COOK

YOU probably were sure in advance that the return of Katharine Cornell and Guthrie McClintic meant another of their perfectly appointed evenings in the theater, a good play superbly staged and a flawless cast supporting a great actress. The news to report is that your warm imagination did not envisage things nearly as good as Lovers and Friends at the Plymouth last night.

Dodie Smith, represented on the New York stage at long intervals since Autumn Crocus a decade ago, has written an excellent play. It is peopled by wise and civilized characters who speak in agreeably cadenced prose salted with gentle humor.

Unlike most of her fellow playwrights, Miss Smith has courage to believe that the emotional upheavals that accompany her characters' falling in love make an engrossing story in themselves. She finds it necessary neither to make them the subject of leering flipperies nor to add such strong events as a murder or a blitz to keep them going. Her love scenes are written with the restraint of speech that belong to the moments when sincere people come closest together. This is a play full of warm, radiant life in its conception and in its writing.

Her story is a series of the sharp turns that apparently deeply rooted affections may take. A middle-aged and successful lawyer comes home to confess that his love has strayed elsewhere after a dozen blissful years with his wife. Within a few months he is wretchedly back to confess his terrible error but meanwhile his wife's affections have strayed in turn. She bravely puts aside her newer swain. Complete blight seems to have descended on her life when she hears not many moons after of the marriage of this man who had sworn such eternal fidelity.

An epilogue brings some of them together for jovially wistful reminiscences of what violent emotions were part of bringing all of them ultimate serenity. Lives are sturdy affairs, Miss Smith assures us, and they don't blight easily even under the strains of love.

Raymond Massey's masterful presence and Miss Cornell's mettlesome femininity are a completely harmonious entity. Oddly, the demands of this play have subdued Mr. Massey's usual style and added spirit to Miss Cornell's. There is a stageful of brilliant and clear-sighted performances to match the pair of stars.

Henry Daniell is permitted some flashes of light comedy obscured in his recent immersions in villainy. Carol Goodner makes a casual trollop amiable and cheering. Anne Burr, youngest in the cast, accomplishes the difficult task of conveying the notion that she is a lying and scheming little wench without doing anything to reveal it openly.

Ingredients such as these in the sagacious directorial control of Guthrie McClintic in a pair of stunning settings designed by Motley—what do you want for your money? Anyway, the theater is not likely to offer more in the way of heartening entertainment. Lovers and Friends hits tops.

"Get Away Old Man"

NEW YORK POST
November 26, 1943

"Get Away Old Man" Brings Abbott and Saroyan Together

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE ABBOTT has produced a play by William Saroyan and as a result Mr. Saroyan's "Get Away Old Man," which came to the Cort on Wednesday, has more form and discipline than any of his previous works.

This Abbott-Saroyan alliance may displease soulful devotees of the madcap genius who have doted upon some of his earlier, more hifalutin plays, full of juvenile tricks, tiresome bombast and poetic obscurity, but "Get Away Old Man" is just a show about Hollywood, and between them the Messrs. Abbott and Saroyan have managed to get an amusing evening out of it.

The program at the Cort is plastered with notices to the effect that it's all intensely fictitious, that no acual persons are indicated, etc., etc., though at one point Mr. Saroyan does admit that he himself may possibly have been the inspiration for Harry Bird, the author who goes to Hollywood to work for Patrick Hammer, vice-president in charge of production at some studio or other, and succeeds in insulting so many people, including Hammer himself, that he is offered all sorts of inducements to write the boss's pet story, "Ave Maria."

Etched in Vitriol

The celebrated film producer in "Get Away Old Man" is a full-length etching in vitriol which might easily become a bit too nauseating were it not for the fact that Mr. Saroyan, or Mr. Abbott, or both, have devoted a good deal of attention to some idiotic doings in the writer's office, which once was a still photographer's studio and now contains, among other props, a clamorous player piano and a blackboard upon which Harry and his drunken friend Sam print anything that happens to occur to them.

A visit from an innocent and completely bewildered Hollywood correspondent for the New York Times is one of the more comic scenes in a generally demented second act and the almost equally mad third act includes a few moments in which the Old Man is so impressed by the deportment of a genuine hospital interne that he decides to sign him up on the spot for the lead in the next "Young Dr. Cavanaugh" epic.

"Get Away Old Man" is not the bang-bang-bang, rush-rush-rush variety of farce to which we have become accustomed under the Abbott trademark, but if we may say so, Mr. Abbott seems to have benefitted from grappling with a Saroyan script almost as much as Saroyan has gained from being taken in hand by a Broadway showman and told when to stop and when to go.

Mutual Benefit

The experience appears to have slowed Mr. Abbott down from the killingly break-neck pace of some of his more steamed-up farces, while it seems to have given Mr. Saroyan some idea of what it means to write a three-act play with a beginning, a middle and an end, instead of straying all over the waterfront meeting policemen and waiters and Postal Telegraph messengers all saying the same things they did in any three Saroyan plays you happened to see last.

The old Saroyan is still audible in "Get Away Old Man"—now and then he does get out of hand and drools on a bit too long, and the first act could stand a bracer, but generally speaking the Abbott-Saroyan alliance is a good idea.

Edward Begley gives a properly obnoxious performance as the producer, Glenn Anders is hilarious as Sam, and Richard Widmark does as well as anybody could with the disjointed role of the writer who is apparently supposed to be Saroyan himself. The rest of the company is well up to the Abbott standard.

"Get Away Old Man"

NEW YORK SUN
November 26, 1943

'Get Away Old Man,' Saroyan's Study of a Genius, Presented at Cort

By WARD MOREHOUSE

WILLIAM SAROYAN didn't like Hollywood and he says so in "Get Away Old Man," which is all about a film boss and the world's greatest writer. It's a weak and ineffectual comedy that includes some enormously funny incidental material.

George Abbott makes the presentation at the Cort, which has been having a disastrous season. Mr. Abbott has done the staging with care and it is quite apparent that he has great affection for the Saroyan version of the boy meets girl theme.

The hero of "Get Away Old Man" is Harry Bird, wonder boy, who is very antic and who is played splendidly by Richard Widmark. There are first-rate performances by Edward Begley, Beatrice Pearson and Glenn Anders. Miss Pearson, in the role of the Hollywood extra, has her first important Broadway role. Hilda Vaughn, an excellent actress, returns after a considerable absence to play a manicurist.

There is some good writing in "Get Away Old Man" but as a play it doesn't come off. You will find it occasionally amusing but also perplexing. The cast includes the decorative Joyce Mathews. John Root's settings are excellent.

'GET AWAY OLD MAN'

Play by William Saroyan; staged by George Abbott; settings by John Root; presented by Mr. Abbott at the Cort Theater Wednesday, November 24, 1943. The cast:

Patrick Hammer	Edward Begley
Harry Bird	Richard Widmark
Rose Schornbloom	Hilda Vaughn
Ben Manheim	William Adams
Sam	Glenn Anders
Correspondent of the N. Y. Times	Edwin Hodge
Martha Harper	Beatrice Pearson
Pianist	Sula Levitch
Bernice Fitch	Joyce Mathews
Messenger	Mason Adams
Doctor	Jerome Thor

NEW YORK TIMES
November 25, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Get Away Old Man"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SOME time ago the Fresno bombshell, William Saroyan, was lured to Hollywood to write what later became "The Human Comedy." At the time there drifted back fabulous reports from the Athens of the West, bizarre and weird chapters in the Saroyan saga. Through with all of that, he then sat down and in six days turned out a play dealing with his adventures among the titans, a play which George Abbott last night offered at the Cort under the name of "Get Away Old Man." It is, to mince no words about the matter, not so good.

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Hitherto the Saroyan plays have had a mixture of humor and an indefinable pathos, the qualities which also have been in the Saroyan short stories. In "Get Away Old Man" there are moments of humor, but there is little trace of the other. The first act is slow and sounds like nothing so much as a parody of the old William Saroyan; the second act is reasonably funny in a brittle sort of fashion; the third act is long and spiritless. Mr. Abbott, who is one of the best directors in the business, has done what he could to give the play life, but the life is not inherently there.

It may be that Mr. Saroyan had such a wretched time in Hollywood that he still was angry when he came to tell about it. His Old Man is the vicious caricature of a movie producer, and the best that can be said of him is that the percentage not heel is plain phoney. His young author is all sweetness and light; a program note may give the answer to that: "If any character in the play is based on any living person in the world, that person is myself." If the author is Mr. Saroyan, which the audience, at least, believed to be the case, he has been doing himself an injustice. He is much greater than that.

The story is of the producer who wishes to make a picture about Mother—all mothers, everywhere—and tries to hire the writer to do the script. The characters include a manicurist, a young girl who wants to be a star but settles for love, a piano player, a drunken friend of the writer. As the producer, Edward Begley gives a straight performance, and as the young author Richard Widmark does what he can with a role which is a little fanciful. Glenn Anders, as the drunken friend, has the part Mr. Saroyan obviously enjoyed writing and treats it accordingly. Beatrice Pearson is the girl who wants to be the star; and Edwin Hodge plays the Correspondent of The New York Times, looking a bit like a copyreader. "Get Away Old Man" still has a long road to travel before it is another "Once in a Lifetime."

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 25, 1943

Saroyan Loses to Hollywood

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MR. SAROYAN, it seems, once went to Hollywood and didn't like it there. Last night he recorded his unflattering views of the place, along with some highly flattering views of himself. *Get Away Old Man* has this much novelty—that it reveals in the benevolent Mr. Saroyan a capacity for anger, and leads him to portray a heel. But the new side of the man is of no help to the playwright: despite some amusing moments, the play is both a muddle and a bore.

Mr. Saroyan is undone both by his refusal to decide what he wants to write about, and by his sloppy manner of writing. In general, he is occupied with the relationship between a ruthless phony of a producer and a young genius he has hired. The genius—though portrayed by the essentially mild Richard Widmark—bears a distinct spiritual resemblance to Saroyan; and it is his pleasure, when not being warm-hearted toward other people, to be snotty and insulting to his employer.

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But though Saroyan takes a consistently admiring attitude toward his genius, in handling the producer he shuttles between harsh satire and wild burlesque. The result is not happy. Bile and buffoonery do not blend well, particularly when they have to blend with all the other things that Mr. Saroyan nonchalantly tosses into the pot. Among the other things, there is one of Mr. Saroyan's out-of-this-world young ladies, who becomes united with the genius in one of Mr. Saroyan's drop-of-a-hat romances. Also featured is a lot of talk about the finer things in life: perhaps one may remind Mr. Saroyan that, in literature, talking about beauty is the worst possible way to achieve it. Also treated at length is the character of the young genius. He is even killed off at one point and buried, as it were, with full military honors; but he is quickly restored to life, and the play proceeds through one of the most protracted last acts on record.

Now and then when Mr. Saroyan just lets go and pictures some loony studio antics, or lets his characters say anything that comes into their heads, he is amusing or exhilarating. But the laughs in *Get Away Old Man* are far fewer than the longueurs.

Richard Widmark makes a likeable genius. As the girl, Beatric Pearson has both good looks and stage presence. William Adams makes a quietly effective Hollywood minion, and Glenn Anders an entertaining drunk. Mr. Abbott has directed competently enough, but his forte is action, which Saroyan fails to provide.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 25, 1943

Dramatic Tone Poem

By HOWARD BARNES

WILLIAM SAROYAN'S undisciplined artistry flames and flickers through "Get Away Old Man." His new play has scenes of splendid imagination and humor, snatches of brilliant portraiture and singing lines. It also has some of the flattest conversational passages that ever induced a playgoer to drowse. While purporting to be an examination of Hollywood nonsense and corruption, it is best when it is contemplating that old gang of Saroyan eccentrics, who are about the most engaging characters ever to people a stage. There is almost no form to the work, but there is so much rich substance that you are not likely to care after a dull first act is finished.

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The author insists in a program note that all of the action in "Get Away Old Man" is invented, but one suspects that he may have used a few notes from his own experiences as a screen writer. In any case, they are exceedingly random impressions. The new offering at the Cort starts out to travesty a big film producer, but the lampoon is neither incisive nor profound. The fellow merely emerges as an unscrupulous ham actor when he emerges at all. F. Scott Fitzgerald did a far better job on Hollywood in his posthumous and unfinished novel "The Last Tycoon." Saroyan has never found out much about the movies, I think. Fortunately, he still knows wonderful, scrammy people, and there are enough of them in the show to make much of it buoyantly entertaining.

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The chief character, as the author frankly admits, is himself, rattling around a west coast factory of dreams, flaying his would-be employers and hobnobbing with strays and drunks. The figure becomes badly blurred at times, as he hurls defiance at a studio head with the title line, becomes involved in an adventitious automobile accident, and goes off with one of those girls who exist only in the Saroyan imagination. It gives some sort of focal point, though, for a crazy-quilt of assorted moods and laughter. The more it sticks to moods and fine comedy the better "Get Away Old Man" is. As a whole, it strikes me as definitely inferior to "The Time of Your Life."

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It has not wanted an expert production. George Abbott has staged it with precision and theatrical effect. The second act, in which the writer and his bibulous side-kick take on the world as it passes, with a variety of pianistic accompaniment and a couple of dart games thrown in, is all of a piece and superb theater. It is when the play becomes serious or analytical that it is tough to take. Richard Widmark is generally excellent as the unwilling scenarist. Edward Begley does his best to give some dimensions to the part of the producer and William Adams is splendid as his chief yes-man. Top honors must go to Glenn Anders, though, who, as the drunk, makes the most of the most solid role in the piece. There is so much that is so good in "Get Away Old Man" that it is a pity that Saroyan could not have given it a more unified texture.